

PIQUE

Newsletter of the Secular Humanist Society of New York

February, 2014

Are we (all the varieties of non-theists) “arrogant”? Should we be? If not, how should we answer the idiots? (Sorry, just a little arrogance there.) But if you feel put-upon as an unbeliever in America, read Asif Iqbal’s story. Also this month, we worry about worrying, bury the Baby Boom, fix our schools, argue that “spiritual” may not be a dirty word and that god is a rather petty person. But first, it’s time for *you* to join the SHSNY Board, then come celebrate Darwin Day - page 7. — JR

SHSNY ELECTION NOTICE

The triennial election for the Board of Directors of the Secular Humanist Society of New York will take place this spring. Notice is given hereby, as it will be in the March and April issues of PIQUE.

Candidate statements will appear in subsequent issues of PIQUE, and those statements, along with ballots, will be mailed to all dues-paid members on April 15 (two ballots to Family Memberships). Returned ballots will be due May 15. Results will be announced in the June issue of PIQUE, and the new 3-year Board term will begin June 1.

Who is eligible?

All dues-paid members of SHSNY are eligible. You may nominate yourself or another member(s)—by letter to the P.O. Box (see masthead, below) or e-mail to editor@shsnny.org—at any time before March 15. Please include a brief statement (100-300 words) summarizing the candidate’s/your qualifications and vision for the future of SHSNY, which may be written by the candidate and/or the nominator. If you nominate someone else, please include a statement by the nominee that s/he is willing to serve.

Who will stand for election?

Our by-laws* require a minimum of five members on the Board, which elects the officers of SHSNY. Currently, the Board consists of 14 members: Remo Cosentino, Mirta Cotto, Arthur Harris, Brian Lemaire, Lee Loshak, Elaine Lynn, Carl Marxer, Donna Marxer, Irv Millman, Carlos Mora, Robert A. Murtha, Jr., John Rafferty, John Wagner, and Mike Weiss — a few of whom, for reasons of age, health, or family or job commitments, are retiring — and all of whom hope that even more people willing to work for SHSNY will nominate themselves, join us, and bring fresh attitudes and new ideas to our organization.

**If you are a member of SHSNY and do not have a copy of the bylaws, call and leave a message at 646-922-7389.*

RUNNING AWAY FROM THE “RELIGION OF PEACE” "Asif Iqbal"

I, Asif Iqbal (not my real name), was born and grew up in Bangladesh, a country with about 90 percent Muslims. I had been a devout Muslim up until I was about 18 years old. It was around that age when I happened to read a book by Araj Ali Matubbar, a homegrown atheist philosopher. That book was a complete turning point in my life. It taught me to question the unquestionable. I then verified some of the issues he raised with regard to the Koran. And my belief in Islam, and in any organized religion for that matter, started to crumble.

Ever since 2008, I started writing anti-Islam, anti-God posts on somewhereinblog.net, a website that draws huge amount of readers speaking my native tongue. This site allows its registered users to create their own blog. I had my own blog on this site under a pseudonym. Many atheists found this blogging platform an oasis in which they could freely keystroke their opinion on the evils of Islam in our country’s perspective.

But our days of freedom in the virtual world did not last long. On 14 January 2013 three unidentified men attacked Asif Mohiuddin, 29, as he left his office, and stabbed him several times in the neck and back. He had long been writing anti-Islam blog posts in Somewhereinblog.net. Rajib Haidar, a brilliant architect, had been writing in Somewhereinblog.net under the pseudonym “thaba baba”. In February, 2013 he was brutally hacked to death near his house by a militant group associated with the Jamaat-e-Islami party.

On March 13, our government formed a committee that would track bloggers and Facebook users who made derogatory remarks about Islam and the Prophet Muhammad. And an email account was opened so that

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

John Rafferty, *President/Editor*; Robert A. Murtha, Jr., *Vice President*; Donna Marxer, *Treasurer*; Lee Loshak, *Secretary*; Remo Cosentino; Mirta Cotto; Arthur Harris; Brian Lemaire; Elaine Lynn; Carl Marxer; Irv Millman; Carlos Mora; John Wagner; Mike Weiss

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Individual membership \$40 per year; Family membership \$65; Subscription only \$30.

Articles published in PIQUE are archived in www.shsnny.org. They may be reprinted, in full or in part, in other newsletters. SHSNY is an Affiliated Local Group of the Council for Secular Humanism, a Charter Chapter of the American Humanist Association, and an Affiliate Member of Atheist Alliance International.

the general people of the country can send their complaints against any such remarks.

On March 29, Islami Andolan Bangladesh, an Islamist group with huge number of members holds a rally in the capital announcing to lay siege to the Prime Minister's Office on April 25 demanding the arrest of "atheist bloggers".

On April 1, an Islamic newspaper and a group of Islamic clerics handed over a list of 84 bloggers to the Ministry of Home Affairs. This list includes my pseudonym used on Somewhereinblog.net. The Ministry of Home Affairs accepted this list with utmost seriousness.

On April 6, Hefajat-e-Islam, a Madrasa-based Islamic fundamentalist group comprising about half a million members (mainly madrasa students and teachers) holds a Long March. I've never ever seen such a massive rally in my capital. In the rally, they announced a 13-point demand that emphatically includes capital punishment for the atheist bloggers.

On May 5 2013 Hefajat-e-Islam holds a second Long March in Dhaka especially to put more pressure on the government into imposing death penalty on the atheist bloggers. Tens of thousands of fanatic Islamists turned the capital into a sea of protesters wearing white robes and skull caps, many wielding posters demanding death sentence for the atheist bloggers.

The two Long Marches did not go in vain. On April 2, the government arrest three atheist bloggers for leaving "derogatory comments about Islam and Prophet Muhammad (*pbuh*)" on the internet Upon their arrest these bloggers were shown in humiliating postures on all TV channels, and were prominently featured in all major newspapers. On the print media, they were forced to pose like serious criminals with their laptop, desktop, and mobile phone prominently displayed on a table in front. The bloggers were thus exposed to more than 150 million people many of whom consider killing an apostate to be an easy staircase to the heaven.

Many of my acquaintances already know which pseudonym I use to write blogs or comment on blogs. It's therefore not unlikely that one or two of them may have sent my whereabouts to the police. Everything considered, I, my wife, also an apostate, and our daughter, who has been brought up in a completely secular family environment, decide to run away. We primarily take refuge in a relative's house, and stay there incognito. Two days before the Long March of Hefajat-e-Islam, I went out leaving my wife and daughter at the relative's house. I take a long distance bus, get down in a remote city, and stay in several hotels for a few days. I could see from my hotel window sporadic processions of fanatic Islamists calling upon the ordinary people to join the Long March to be held on 5 May. They were demanding death for the atheist bloggers. I return to Dhaka on the day of the Long March, meet my family, and decide to run away to India. ...

Staying in India more than a month, I return to Dhaka. In a few weeks I, my wife, and our daughter apply for visit visa to the USA, which we were granted. Now that we're in the USA, we feel much safer.

ANTI-SCIENCE STUPIDITY IN AMERICA: IT'S ABOUT RELIGION, NOT POLITICS

John Rafferty

(Based on "All About Adam", by Lexington, in *The Economist*, 11/23/2013; and "We Have a Dumb Religion Problem – Not a Political Problem", by Frank Schaeffer, on *The Blog on huffingtonpost.com*, 11/08/2013)

Want to know why we have government gridlock in America today, science denial, unprecedented partisan acrimony, and even total shutdown over such arcana as the debt limit? It's not politics, it's religion, says Frank Schaeffer, himself a believer, in a blog on HuffingtonPost.

"To get what's happening to the GOP and to America, you need to understand the theology of the extremist, frankly stupid and misinformed evangelical heartland. We don't have a political problem. We have an evangelical stupidity problem."

Background: By the 1930s the liberals, progressives, agnostics and atheists had won the half-century-long intellectual argument in America between science and religion. Evolution was proven and accepted, as was Einstein's relativistic universe and a four-billion-year-old Earth, while bible inerrancy and "old-time religion" were dead issues except in the hills and hollows of the Bible Belt.

Yes, we won the argument, Schaeffer says, "but lost the popular vote".

And, as Lexington (author's name) wrote in *The Economist* last November, "A quest for certainty is an American tradition ... [and Americans] admire fundamental texts (the Constitution, for example) that plain citizens may parse for immutable truths."

Cue a new, post-WW2 wave of evangelical fundamentalism, fueled by fear of a frightening new atheist bogeyman - "Godless Communism" - and sold to millions across the country via the new technology of television by charismatic preachers like Billy Graham.

The message was simple: 1) godless communism is evil (and has the atomic bomb!); 2) religion is our bulwark against communism/atheism (same thing, right?), and is the bedrock of American life; 3) in this new Cold War and the war for the soul of America, there can be no compromise, no nuance; 4) science and liberalism encourage doubt and skepticism, and so are suspect at best, "un-American" and "pinko" at (most likely) worst; 5) the more fundamental and "foursquare" the religion, the more "American"; 6) any attack by science on fundamental beliefs is an attack on America, the family, and God. Case closed.

(Hey, geezers, remember "Better dead than red"?)

But the times they are, indeed, a-changin, and today's young, even the believers, are impatient with orthodox religion's rigidity. According to a Barna Group poll, they "feel stifled by elders who demonize secular America", and are abandoning the parents' churches in droves.

So, in the face of such doubts and desertions, what should science-denying, Bible-believing nutcases do?

Double down, of course. Take, for example, the “Adam Controversy” that vexed a recent meeting of evangelical theologians, “where Biblical inerrancy topped the agenda”.

“A [tricky] controversy has been triggered by findings from the genome that modern humans, in their genetic diversity, cannot be descended from a single pair of individuals. Rather, there were at least several thousand “first humans”. That challenges the historical existence of Adam and Eve, and has sparked a crisis of conscience among evangelical Christians persuaded by genetic science. This is not an esoteric point ... many conservative theologians hold that without a historical Adam, whose sin descended directly to all humanity, there would be no reason for Jesus to come to Earth to redeem man’s Fall.”

In other words, if you believe the science of the genome, you can’t believe in Jesus – no small “esoteric point”, because academics, Lexington tells us, are losing their jobs over the Adam Controversy. And, says Schaeffer, it’s all far more worrisome than academic unemployment.

“Delusional religion has become delusional politics. The evangelical establishment teaches a literal return of Christ to judge – and kill – the unbelievers. This is extreme stuff, and that spirit of retributive extremism has jumped the tracks into our politics. And it’s a fact that the media, today’s mainline denominations, the more moderate members of both parties and the general population seem to find too embarrassing to address honestly.

“When secular pundits wonder why a segment of the population seems hard to convince of basic economic or environmental facts and that segment opts for their own special facts mainlined from talk radio or Fox News or the religious right media, what they miss is that the political, fact-free beliefs are possible only because of the religion that demanded a choice between facts and faith, between science and theology.”

I have often confessed my liberalism in these pages, as well as my bipartisan acceptance of what I consider true conservatism. I don’t think people who believe in tradition, small government, low taxes and strong defense are agents of Satan – why would I? But that’s exactly what the religious fanatics who call themselves “conservatives” today think of me. And of you. And of the majority of Americans who voted for Obama or Clinton, or who believe that women should control their own bodies, or that children are entitled to a fact-based education, and that everyone should be allowed to love whomever the hell they want.

“So,” Schaeffer says, “let’s tell the truth: a fanatical religious element is dominating our political life these days. ... Wake up: our evangelical-led right isn’t interested in policy. They are an apocalyptic cult led by the none-too-bright. And they won’t quit.”

Neither must we. When next you are asked by some innocent, “Why are you humanists/atheists/agnostics so angry?” tell them it’s because we’re fighting for nothing less than America.

BOB MURTHA REMEMBERS WHEN RIGHT-WING POLITICS WERE WORSE THAN STUPID

Robert A. Murtha Jr., V.P., SHSNY

I am writing, somewhat belatedly, to join in the celebration of the publication of *A Fit of Pique*, your collection of essays from this publication.* It is a glorious (if occasionally inglorious) trip through the curious religions of our tribe.

A caveat: You are a sanguine fellow; very much so in light of our nation’s history of ignoring the Bill of Rights where dissidents are concerned. I speak as one who was harassed and terrified by FBI agents at the time I was playing a significant role organizing anti-Vietnam war activities. (Family and friends from all over the country were calling to ask me, “What did you do, Bob?”).

Charlotte Marzani’s husband [SHSNY member Charlotte is the author of *A Quarter Century of Un-Americana* – JR], Carl Marzani, served 32 months in sundry Federal dungeons, including months in isolation, based on the perjured testimony of an FBI witness. By the time Carl got out of jail, his film-making business had been destroyed and the level of fear and intimidation was so high that he was never able to get another job. Everything that Carl and Charlotte had/have was made with their own hands, financed by bank loans cosigned by her father. During those years they were living very modestly on the \$80 or so that Carl earned weekly as a carpenter, plus Charlotte’s royalties. Nonetheless, he was falsely accused of being a KGB “contact” and his little business, Marzani & Munsell, a small but significant left wing publisher, was falsely accused of secretly taking Soviet money.

As bad as Carl’s victimization was, he was merely the first of thousands who were falsely accused of disloyalty, treason, spying and plotting the violent overthrow of the U.S. government. Those who were not jailed under trumped-up charges under the Smith Act were hounded from their jobs and deprived of their livelihoods. Many ended up doing day labor to survive. Others committed suicide.

I was lucky; my boss, Otto Herbst, politely saw two FBI agents out of his office when they came around to talk about me. In 1970 my father, who shared my name, was denied a very good job with the State of California when my name came up in the course of his routine background investigation. He eventually found a decent job elsewhere. He never said anything about this to me. I learned about it from my brothers after Dad died in 1986.

**Shameless Plug: A Fit of Pique is now available in paper and on Kindle at amazon.com – JR*

BUT BOB, MAYBE JOE MCCARTHY WAS RIGHT **Amanda Marcotte**

(Excerpted from “5 Christian Right Delusions and Lies About History”, on AlterNet, 11/21/2013)

The Christian right is most known for their denial of inconvenient science, but in many respects, they’re just as bad when it comes to the facts of history. After all, no matter what the topic, they know they can just make

stuff up and their people will believe it. So why not do the same when it comes to political history? ...

A new and extremely toxic myth is beginning to percolate on the Christian right: Insisting that Sen. Joseph McCarthy, a paranoid alcoholic who saw communist subversives in every corner, was actually an upstanding guy fighting for God and country. In 2003, Ann Coulter published a book she claims vindicates McCarthy, but its impact wasn't felt until 2010, when the Christian right members who stack the Texas State School Board tried to get the pro-McCarthy theories into Texas school books.

Christian right fanatics attempted to claim that McCarthy had been vindicated by something (wrongly) called the "Verona papers" (they're actually named the "Venona papers"). There is a Venona project that has reputed historians who show that the Soviets did have spies in the country, but saying that means McCarthy was right is like saying I'm right to call your mother a serial killer because there are serial killers in America. Harvey Klehr, one of the experts working on the Venona project, denounced Christian right efforts to exploit his work to vindicate McCarthy, noting that McCarthy mostly just fingered innocent people in his paranoid haze.

The new information from Russian and American archives does not vindicate McCarthy. He remains a demagogue, whose wild charges actually made the fight against communism more difficult. Like Gresham's Law, McCarthy's allegations marginalized the accurate claims. Because his facts were so often wrong, real spies were able to hide behind the cover of being one of his victims and even persuade well-meaning but naïve people that the whole anti-communist cause was based on inaccuracies and hysteria.

That the Soviets spied on the U.S. is neither surprising — not even to liberals — nor indicative that the communist witch hunts were an appropriate response. The Christian right's interest in rehabilitating McCarthy probably has less to do with readjudicating the anti-communist cause and more to do with their modern-day obsession with promoting paranoid liars in the McCarthy mold to leadership positions. If they can instill the idea that McCarthy was vindicated by history, it will be easier to argue that the current crop of politically powerful right-wing nuts such as Michele Bachmann and Ted Cruz will actually "be proven right by history".

But McCarthy wasn't and neither will they be.

THE NEW YORK TIMES SORT-OF CONGRATULATES THE BOY SCOUTS, BUT JOHN WAGNER DEMURS

To the Editor:

Re: "Scouting's Incomplete Evolution", Yes, the Boy Scouts still need to take steps to allow full participation of gays in Scouting; but I am distressed that *The Times* did not note that the Boy Scouts still require a belief in god to participate in Scouting. That policy excludes many Americans and it is no more acceptable than excluding gays.

— John Wagner, Co-Chair, the Secular Coalition for New York

A BOOMER ASKS: WHERE'S MY JET PACK?

David Rafferty

(Reprinted from Greenwich (CT) Time, 12/29/2013)

Depending on whom you ask, a human generation is traditionally 20 years long, which sounds short to me. Or 30, which is the commonly accepted span between an adult and his children. While some even say 40 years, time enough for that new crop of children to start to develop their own identity. Whichever idea you subscribe to, in just a couple of days the calendar will turn to 2014 and we will be 50 years removed from the birth of the last of the Baby Boom generation.

Remember the Boomers? Born to a prosperous post-war America in the mid-20th century, these starry-eyed optimists were going to be smarter, more resourceful, more creative, and would transform the world as no one had ever done before. They helped create the vision of what we all thought the 21st century would look like. Space stations and voyages to Mars. A cure for cancer and healthy lives twice as long as we enjoy now. An end to hunger, undersea colonies, and uber-cool jet packs. Now, on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the last of the boomers, I must ask ... Where's my jet pack?

Back in the day, when forecasting the 21st century was all the rage, we had a different sensibility as Americans. Yes there was still segregation, women "knew their place", and there were likely just as many cement-headed louts as you find on today's Fox News, but as a nation we celebrated education and forward thinking optimism. We held ticker tape parades for scientists, concert pianists, and heads of state from countries today's kids couldn't find on a map if you spotted them the continent. The GI Bill, maybe the best idea we ever had, motivated millions to be the first in their family to go to college. While tens of thousands answered the call to service and to making the world a better place though organizations like the Peace Corps. Our answer to Sputnik was to make ourselves smarter. Send even more kids to college to become scientists and engineers. You had to be smart to win a game show and people read 5,000 word essays in literary magazines, not *People* magazine.

Today a misspelled 140-character tweet is too challenging for some. Being smart went from cool to lame. Following your gut replaced following the facts. Far too many of those college kids realized science was hard and Wall Street paid better. We stopped caring about human rights and suffering around the globe. Our government no longer had the stomach for investing time and money in blue-sky ideas, and companies became shackled to shareholders and quarterly profits.

In fairness, we are getting the super-powerful computing that was theorized, but as individuals we rarely use it for great or inspiring purposes. Mostly we take pictures of our breakfast, make duck faces at each other, search for porn, desperately hope people "Like" us, and make horribly disturbing and insensitive anonymous comments about other people. So where did we Boomers go wrong?

I'll contend it was the day we accepted Reaganism and

its “trickle-down” ideology that favors the rich over everyone and anything else. Its lack of commitment to investing in the future, its greed-is-good mantra, and its pathological insistence that anything Americans do is ipso facto better than anything done anywhere else.

So on this historic anniversary, let this writer, on behalf of his generational peers, announce that the Baby Boom is done. To my children and theirs, it is now officially Your Time. If the past couple of decades are any example, we will not be doing anything more to contribute to the society we bequeath to you. In fact we’ll probably hurt and hinder your efforts when you try to do great, jaw-dropping things.

But in return for our stepping back I ask of you two conditions. First, recognize that what we dreamed about – the desire to invent and explore, the balance between profitability and humanity, educating and uplifting everybody equally, and finding sustainable solutions to long-term global challenges – these are honorable goals you should dedicate yourselves to, even if we often fell short.

Second, make sure my grandkids get those jet packs.

START WORRYING The Readers of PIQUE

In answer to the Page 1 question (and essay) in our January issue, “Happy New Year – What Should We Be Worried About?”, six PIQUE readers found six different ways to answer the question.

Donna Marxer: What’s to worry about? The pathological collective fear of change – a failure of nerve on a grand scale. Change is scary, inevitable, already here – and to not be able to accept it and change with it is societal suicide. This fear is probably a by-product of anti-intellectualism and goes hand-in-hand with denial.

Remo Cosentino: If I were genuinely altruistic, and not a run-of-the-mill selfish human, I would worry about the sorry future of humanity predicted by some of the “top scientists, technologists, writers, and academics” quoted. Regretfully, within the time left to me, I’m in Joseph LeDoux’s camp: I “will not worry too much”. The world will or will not survive the coming horrors; we have little control over them.

Cultures, like countries struck by catastrophic events, can be destroyed overnight. Surprisingly, none of the “experts” have anything to say on an Armageddon of the secular variety: the possibility that some deranged individual will commandeer an atom bomb and loosen it on the world. As to America, there is little evidence that it – and the world – has the intelligence, imagination or desire to deter the future problems predicted.

It’s disappointing to read how parochial the “experts” concerns are: one names “men” as the problem; should we do without them? Another says that “technology may endanger democracy”; what democracy? Lastly, that “the internet will end up benefiting existing power structures and not society in general”, as if in the past existing power structures did not always benefit. On what planet have these “experts” been living for the past century or so?

Norman Condit: My worry – that ideology-blinded radicals

and Tea Partiers can’t absorb this simple message: “An American eagle cannot fly with a right wing alone; it needs a left wing working in coordination with its right wing to be able to soar.” Fantastic January issue – Happy New Year!

Edd Doerr: Here are some of my 2014 worries: 1) That the education pseudo-reformers and privatizers will continue their war on public schools (see my Dec/Jan Free Inquiry column); 2) That the opponents of reproductive choice will continue their war on women’s rights unimpeded; 3) That human overpopulation and environmental degradation will continue unabated; 4) That Pope Francis will not back the church away from its misogynistic condemnation of contraception, despite majority Catholic support for such a move; 5) That the GOP will continue to obstruct anything even remotely liberal or moderate; 6) That pompous pundits like Douthat, Will, Krauthammer, etc., will continue pontificating to mislead the hordes of the uninformed; 7) That the electronic media will continue their descent into the miasma of mediocrity; 8) That Mayor de Blasio will not stand up adequately to the various brands of fundamentalists; 9) That Justices like Scalia and Thomas will continue their destructive trajectories; 10) That uninformed voters will allow rich conservative propagandists to influence their voting ... and that’s enough for now.

Flash Light: The Pope won’t judge gays; atheists are forgiven for disbelief; the German “Bishop of Bling” only got suspended for squandering \$42 million on his personal living quarters ... but Australian priest Fr Greg Reynolds gets excommunicated for advocating priesthood for women and same-sex marriage. On my list of things to worry about, I can cross off, “The Catholic Church becomes so liberal under Pope Francis it starts gaining converts.”

Walter Balcerak: It goes almost without saying that January is another fine issue. As a retired editor, I understand and appreciate the thinking and effort that must go into creating such an excellent publication.

My suggestion as to what we should be worried about: the seemingly endless proliferation of lists. (I’d do a smiley face right here, but really, I’m much too old for that.)

READINGS FOR THE MARCH BOOK CLUB Elaine Lynn, SHSNY Book Club Editor

Our book for March 6 is *The Oxford Book of Modern Science Writing*, a huge treasure-trove in a moderately-priced paperback, and choosing selections from it that we could all read and discuss was nearly impossible. But here are my suggestions, all very short.

Creation Revisited, by Peter Atkins (p.11);

One Self: A Meditation on the Unity of Consciousness, by Nicholas Humphrey (p. 96);

The Rise and Fall of the Third Chimpanzee, by Jared Diamond (p. 110);

Religion and Science, by Albert Einstein (p. 235);

The Character of Physical Law, by Richard Feynman (p. 247);

What is Life?, by Erwin Schrodinger (p. 249);

A Brief History of Time, by Stephen Hawking (p. 342);

Little Men and Flying Saucers, by Loren Eiseley (p. 393).

SHSNY CALENDAR: FEBRUARY - APRIL 2014

SHSNY BOOK CLUB

THURS, FEB 6, 7-8:30 pm
in the front room of
THE COMMUNITY CHURCH
OF NEW YORK

28 East 35 St. (Park-Mad)
(3 doors West of the church - red door)
We'll discuss

36 ARGUMENTS FOR THE EXISTENCE OF GOD: A Work of Fiction

Rebecca Newberger Goldstein

36 Arguments for the
Existence of God

plunges into the great debate of our day: the clash between faith and reason. Through the enchantment of fiction, award-winning novelist and MacArthur Fellow Rebecca Newberger Goldstein shows that the tension between religion and doubt cannot be understood through rational argument alone. It also must be explored from the point of view of individual people caught in the raptures and torments of religious experience in all their variety.

After *Time* magazine calls best-selling Author Cass Seltzer "the atheist with a soul", he is haunted by reminders of the two people who ignited his passion to understand religion: a literary scholar with a suspicious obsession with messianism – and an angelic six-year-old mathematical genius who is heir to the leadership of a Hasidic sect.

Goldstein has produced a true crossover novel, complete with a nail-biting climactic debate ("Resolved: God Exists") at Harvard.

– Paper & Kindle editions

Join us even if you haven't
finished reading.

The SHSNY Book Club
is open to all ... and free!



SHSNY BOOK CLUB

THURS, MARCH 6, 7-8:30 pm
at Community Church of NY
28 East 35 Street (Park-Mad)

THE OXFORD BOOK OF MODERN SCIENCE WRITING Richard Dawkins, Ed.

Boasting almost one hundred articles and book excerpts, this is a breathtaking celebration of the finest writing by scientists (Gould, Pinker, Einstein, Huxley, Dennett, Turing) packed with scintillating essays that make must reading for every science buff. – *Paper*

NOTE: You don't have to read it all!
See page 5 for a short list of readings
selected for discussion by Book Club
Editor Elaine Lynn.

SHSNY BOOK CLUB

THURS, APRIL 3, 7-8:30 pm
at Community Church of NY
28 East 35 Street (Park-Mad)

WHO'S IN CHARGE? Free Will and the Science of the Brain

Michael S. Gazzaniga

In this remarkable book, the "father of cognitive neuroscience" makes a powerful and provocative argument that counters the common wisdom that our lives are wholly determined by physical processes we cannot control.

Gazzaniga's case against the idea that we live in a "determined" world is fascinating and liberating, solidifying his place along with Oliver Sachs and other bestselling authors exploring the mysteries of the human brain.

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AND MEET US ON MEETUP

www.meetup.com/shsnny-org/

BRUNCH & CONVERSATION SUNDAY, FEB 23, 12 NOON MONTHLY CASUAL BRUNCH New Restaurant TBD

After a disastrous brunch at Radiance January 19, we are on the hunt once again for a brunch venue. Watch your Inbox, Meetup and Facebook for the news. Suggestions: editor@shsnny.org.

February Brunch Discussion:
Do we cross the line to "atheist arrogance"? Should we?
(See pages 8-9)

MONDAY, FEB 10, 7:00 pm SHSNY MOVIE NIGHT Stone Creek Bar & Lounge 140 East 27 St (Lex-3rd Aves) CONSTANTINE'S SWORD

An exploration of the dark side of Christianity, following acclaimed author and former priest James Carroll on a journey of remembrance and reckoning. This "magnificent" (*NYTimes*) documentary examines the history of anti-Semitism in the Catholic Church and the link between the U.S. military and the Christian right. From Constantine's reign in the fourth century to today's evangelical base at the Air Force Academy. Liev Schreiber, Eli Wallach, Natasha Richardson.



After-film Discussion:
Anti-Semitism in America in 2014:
a little, a lot, or not?

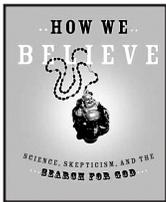
SHSNY Movie Night is FREE.
(But put something on the bar beside your elbow.)

SHAMELESS PLUG #2

A Fit of Pique, John Rafferty's "witty", "delightful" collection of his essays from these pages, is now available in paperback and on Kindle from Amazon.com.

SHSNY CALENDAR: FEBRUARY - APRIL 2014

GREAT LECTURES ON DVD
WED, FEB 26, 7 pm
Stone Creek Bar & Lounge
140 East 27 St. (Lex-3rd Aves)
WHY PEOPLE BELIEVE
IN GOD: An Empirical Study
on a Deep Question
Michael Shermer



Dr. Shermer has undertaken a monumental study of religion and the belief in god that includes the results of an exhaustive empirical study that asked 10,000 Americans what and why they believe. Among the startling findings is that the number one reason people give for their belief in god is the design, natural beauty, and complexity of the world. Most people think it could not have happened without an intelligent designer.

Great Lectures on DVD is FREE.
(But put something on the bar beside your elbow.)

HUMANISM 102
MONDAY, FEB 24, 6:30-8:30
Community Church of New York
28 East 35 Street (red door)
Meeting/Discussion #4:
Religion & Politics in America
Since Scopes
Readings

Book:
Frank Lambert: *Religion in American Politics (Chapters 4-8) - paperback*
Online:
•History News Net: *Think Religion Plays a Bigger Role in Politics Today?*
•People for the American Way: *12 Rules for Mixing Religion and Politics (Links to both are posted at shsny.org - click Feb 24 on Calendar of Events)*
Note: You can do the online reading in an hour or so. If you have not done the reading, you may still audit the discussion - all are welcome!

Early Booking Discount is extended:
Pay by February 10, and save 10%!

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 15, 7:00 pm
Our 6th Annual
SHSNY ANNIVERSARY & DARWIN DAY
CELEBRATION & BANQUET
Golden Unicorn Restaurant, 18 East Broadway
(in the heart of Chinatown)

Come gather with your fellow (and sororal) NYC freethinkers at "the Côte Basque of Chinese restaurants" to celebrate the 205th birthday of Charles Darwin and the 26th Anniversary of the birth of SHSNY.

Highlights of the evening:

13-Course Chinese Banquet

Vegetarian Spring Rolls; Vegetarian Steamed Dumplings; Peking Duck; Shrimp with Walnuts; Scallops in Black Pepper Sauce; Vegetable Soup with Tofu; Eggplant with Hoisin Sauce; Steak with Broccoli; Sautéed Baby Bok Choy; Crispy Fish Hong Kong Style; House Special Vegetable Fried Rice; Vegetarian Noodles with Mushrooms; Cookies and Fruit Platter

Election and Presentation of the **10th Annual SHSNY Dumbth Award**

Vote twice (see page 12) for the most clueless, reality-challenged public personality of 2013 who will receive our horse's-ass trophy.



Special Guest Speaker **David Orenstein, the "Paleolibrarian"** **"Celebrating Charles Darwin** **and the Idea that Changed the World"**

Host of the hugely popular Paleolibrarian blog, Dr. David Orenstein is a full professor and department chair at Medgar Evers College (CUNY), and also serves as an adjunct professor of anthropology. He has spoken nationally and internationally on free expression, atheism and freethought issues, and how technologies impact social revolutions. His new book - *Atheists in their Own Words: How Non-Believers Make the World Safer, Richer and Kinder* - will be published this fall by The Humanist Press.

Cost, all-inclusive: \$45 per person. (Cash bar)

Book now (by February 10) and save 10% - just \$40/pp.

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THE ARROGANCE OF ATHEISM?

Derek Beres

(Reprinted from *bigthink.com*, 12/19/2013)

A few weeks ago I found myself engaged in an all-too-familiar debate. She was frustrated that I was not subscribing to her idea that “everything happens for a reason”, and that even tragedies are “meant to teach us something”.

For the most part, such statements are usually invalidated with a simple question. I asked whether or not Super Typhoon Haiyan, which devastated a large swath of the Philippines and killed over 6,000 people, was part of any sort of cosmic plan.

“Yes,” was her reply, followed by, “those deaths happened to teach the rest of us a lesson.” For the most part even the most hopeful believers usually play agnostic on the question of natural tragedies, but this one refused to lose any ground. Since admitting that the typhoon could have just been a tragic occurrence did not fit into her take on reality, she had to instead craft it to fit into her blueprint.

I’ve heard similar logic from astrology devotees: it works sometimes, but not always, but when it does it really works. This is the mental equivalent of creating a vision board with 30 objects and swearing that if one “manifests”, it must have been the intention of the board, conveniently forgetting the other 29.

You know, like science.

I was admittedly stunned to hear that this woman truly thought thousands of people had to die to teach “us” a lesson, especially given that she could not conjure one possible example of what that lesson was. Yet what didn’t surprise me was her notion that “atheism is arrogant”, something I hear often when involved in any such conversation.

Arrogance is not reserved for the realm of the non-believing, of course. In fact, as Sam Harris noted, there exists an innumerable list of things we don’t believe in, yet none warrant a special name. Without engaging in a dialectical battle of what atheism “means”, for now I’ll keep it simple: people are shocked to find out you don’t believe what they know must be true, thus earning you the title of arrogant.

To be fair, there is plenty of pompousness displayed by people of every outlook. Sometimes what is portrayed as arrogance, however, is simply someone making a larger point. Recall the recent “controversy” of the Festivus display in Florida, where a pole constructed from Pabst Blue Ribbon beer cans was erected next to a nativity manger.

Since a 1997 Seinfeld episode put the invented holiday into our consciousness, Festivus became known as a comedic take on a serious topic: the commercialization of Christmas. With this year’s trend of businesses opening on Thanksgiving Day instead of Black Friday, the notion of Festivus, often written off as a joke (which it was, to some extent), points to unconscious shopping reflexes we’ve culturally developed.

Chaz Stevens’ six-foot pole in Tallahassee calls out the mindset of believers who appropriated a pagan solstice celebration as a religious ritual and think this does not

contradict the separation of church and state. Underlying this ideology is the notion that a brand of religion set the foundation of this country, and while a democratic process allows for anyone to believe (or not believe) in whatever you’d like, the baseline has already been set. It must then be you who is diverging from it, regardless of direction.

And atheists, recall, are arrogant.

This supposition runs deeply in many faithful minds, originating with one clichéd question: How could you not believe? What’s ultimately frustrating about this mentality is that being an ethical person must be intertwined with a higher power. Grieving over 6,000 humans in a faraway country and donating to an organization that helps rebuild that nation takes no beliefs whatsoever. Thinking that the typhoon made landfall for a divine reason, however, does.

Perhaps next time I’m confronted with such an impossible argument I’ll remember Herb Silverman’s advice. It strikes at the heart of the arrogance argument by using rationality. I’m not convinced any ground will be gained, but it’s one of the best I’ve come across in stating things as they are.

Next time you hear someone making the claim of arrogant atheism, present these statements and see which actually sounds more arrogant. You could say the second worldview is more agnostic than atheistic, but in terms of the arrogance argument, the result is the same.

Worldview 1: I know God created the entire universe just for the benefit of humans. He watches me constantly and cares about everything I say and do. I know how He wants me and everyone else to behave and believe. He is perfect and just, which is why we face an eternity of either bliss or torture, depending on whether or not we believe in Him.

Worldview 2: We’re the product of millions of years of evolution. Most species are extinct, as humans will eventually be. I hope to make a positive difference because it’s the right thing to do, not because of future rewards or punishments in an afterlife. When I don’t know something, which is often, I say, “I don’t know.”

SNAPPY ANSWERS (FOR ATHEISTS) TO STUPID QUESTIONS (BY THEISTS)

Hemant Mehta, *The Friendly Atheist*

(Edited and excerpted from “*The Atheist Voice*” video, “15 Things to NEVER Say to an Atheist”)

Where do you get your morality?

We all have morals. We all have ethics. Ours don’t derive from a holy book. And I would hope that your bible isn’t the only reason you’re not killing everybody in sight.

But isn’t your life empty?

No. I don’t believe in a god, but I believe in many other things, and there are a lot that give my life meaning.

Why do you hate God?

Atheists don’t hate god; atheists don’t believe in god. We also don’t hate unicorns.

But you can’t disprove God, can you?

I want to know why Christians have no problem disbelieving in Hindu gods, other religions' gods, and just dismiss them. They never think about them. It's not like they're sitting around thinking "Maybe Zeus does exist." No, they're just like, "Of course Zeus doesn't exist. It's silly for anybody to think that he does."

What if you're wrong?

If I'm wrong, then basically what you're assuming is that God is going to punish me for asking honest questions ... and ending up at conclusions he doesn't like.

Why can't you just have faith?

You think God's given me this mind to use, but you're asking me to close it when it comes to religion. No, I don't have to have faith. I have to understand what I'm thinking.

Why won't you just open your heart to God?

There's nothing wrong with my heart. It's not like I'm actively shielding myself from a god. I'm not wearing an aluminum foil hat or something on my head.

What happened in your childhood?

My childhood was fine and there was nothing wrong with the way I grew up. Nope, it really just was that I thought about my religious belief and I realized there was no evidence to back it up. And the more I thought about it, the more convinced I became.

Have you read the Bible?

I guarantee you that if you know atheists – outspoken atheists – they know more about the Bible than most Christians you know. If you gave them a quiz the atheist would do better. We think about this stuff all the time; what atheist books have *you* read?

I'll pray for you.

Thanks? I mean, I appreciate that your heart is in the right place, but prayer is not going to do anything. You know, if I'm going through a rough time, don't tell me you'll pray for me. If you really want to make a difference, tell me how you're actually going to help me.

Do you worship the Devil?

I don't believe in the Devil. I don't believe in a god. I don't believe in miracles. I don't believe in a lot of supernatural things. And Satan is as silly as God is.

Isn't atheism a religion?

Atheism is a religion like Off is a TV channel, like bald is a hair color. It just doesn't make any sense.

Why are you so angry?

Because religious people do a lot of crazy things in the name of God. And I'm not even talking about terrorism; I'm [talking about them] passing laws that restrict LGBT rights and women's rights, about whether they make bad-science or revisionist-history curriculum decisions. They do things that make me really upset because I value the truth.

IS GOD REALLY THAT BAD?

Jonathan Engel

As a non-believer, I am frequently surprised at the low opinion that believers tend to have of their respective gods. Oh sure, they say that their god or gods are perfect and wise and fair and just and generous and

kind, etc., but they tend to act as if they don't quite believe all of that to be true.

This came to mind as I read a short blurb in the December 30, 2013 *Sports Illustrated*. Under the headline "Strange Days, Indeed" (written by Kevin Kerr), the article recounted strange sports stories from the past year, and included a paragraph under the caption "Beast a Burden". It's short enough to re-state here in its entirety:

A high school runner in Whitley County, KY, was set to compete in a regional cross-country meet when she was assigned the bib number 666, "the number of the beast" according to the Bible. Codie Thacker and her coach appealed unsuccessfully for a new number, so she decided not to race. "I didn't want to risk my relationship with God," she said.

My first thought was to feel sorry for this young lady. She had probably trained very hard for this meet, and now she was declining to participate because of some silly numerology superstition. How sad. But something else came to mind as well. What a low opinion this young lady has of her god. After all, it's just a number on a bib that she had no part in choosing for herself. Yet she seriously feared that her god would abandon her just for putting on the bib and running in a race. What kind of god would punish this child for something so minor that in any event she had no control over? And why did Ms. Thacker assume that this would be the case? She could have thought, "My god is just and merciful, and so s/he will understand that I've really done nothing wrong here and forgive me for any minor transgression I might have committed in wearing bib number 666." But no, she assumed the worst of her god (that wearing her assigned number would so anger her/him that it would put their relationship at risk) and declined to run in a race that was no doubt of some importance to her.

Why does this young lady have such fear of her supposedly just and loving god? Would any rational person think it fair for God to punish her just for running in her assigned bib number? So why the assumption that her god will be so petty and unfair? Believers are often referred to, in an approving way, as "god fearing". Why? If a person's god is so just and merciful, what is there to be afraid of, especially if you've led a basically decent life? Non-believers are frequently asked if they're not afraid of God's wrath after death if it turns out they're wrong and there really is a god (or gods) and an afterlife. We're asked "what will you say to God when he thunders out the question "WHY DIDN'T YOU BELIEVE IN ME"? (The philosopher Bertrand Russell was said to reply to that question "Not enough evidence, God"). But this assumes that what gods care most about when judging us for our final destination of heaven or hell is whether we believed in him/her when we were alive. Really? Can an all-powerful, all-knowing, immortal being really be that insecure? And why are his/her most ardent believers so sure that this is the case?

One of the reasons that I don't fear the "Why didn't you believe in me?" question, apart from the fact that I strongly doubt that it will ever be asked of me, especially after I'm

dead, is that I believe that I've led a basically decent life. I'm not perfect, of course, but then, who is? (Not even God, apparently). I've tried to be a good son, brother, husband, father, neighbor, and citizen. I care about my fellow man and woman, and try to treat everyone I come across fairly. I give as much to charity as I can afford, and don't try to gain anything to which I'm not entitled. If there is a god, and that's not good enough, then the hell with him/her (so to speak).

I just can't believe that an all-powerful being would be so touchy about whether I believed in him/her and punish me if I didn't. And yet, many of the most fervent believers on earth (and there are a lot of them, although, curiously enough, they don't believe in the same gods; can't all be right) think some god will punish them not only for non-belief, but for driving a car on Saturday, or getting a blood transfusion even if they need one to save their life, or having a glass of wine, or using contraception to prevent unintended pregnancy etc., ad infinitum, including, evidently, wearing a bib in a cross-country race that contains a disagreeable number. I may not believe in God as many of my fellow humans do, but at least I don't think of her/him as a nasty, arbitrary, insecure bully. Why do they?

“SPIRITUALITY” IS NOT A DIRTY WORD

Walter Balcerak

At a meeting of secularist humanists I attended, I spoke of feeling, years earlier, an overwhelming sense of oneness with the universe. I called it a “spiritual” experience, only to be criticized by the discussion leader for resorting to a supernatural explanation. He also expressed disdain for people who describe themselves as “spiritual but not religious.”

His attitude is commonplace, because many secularists consider “spirituality” and “spiritism” to be synonyms. But “spiritism” is belief in spooky things, while in modern usage “spirituality” frequently means openness to experiences that transcend everyday consciousness.

Furthermore, it is a mistake to scorn, over an issue of semantics, people who describe themselves as “spiritual but not religious”. A recent Gallup poll found that as many as 33 percent of U.S. residents describe themselves that way and, according to another survey, 72 percent of Generation Y young adults say they are “spiritual but not religious”. Although a significant number of these people believe in a deity or transcendent power, many do not. For that reason, secularist humanists ought to treat the millions of “spiritual” Americans as potential allies.

It's true that “spirituality” mostly denoted religiousness in the past, but its evolving definition is no more religious than the expressions “soul food” or “that's the spirit”. Increasingly, spirituality describes the human capacity to become acutely aware of our inner life and of our intimate relationship with the outer world, especially with other living things, and, in fact, with the entire universe. In a lesser form, it is aroused by great music and art, the beauty of nature, and the majesty of the nighttime sky. It is an entirely natural

event that involves nothing supernatural. In its most intense form, sometimes called the “oceanic experience”, it may be triggered by taking drugs, meditating, stimulating the brain, and, in my experience, an intense emotional state.

A poem I wrote years ago describes my unforgettable spiritual experience. Here are some excerpts.

SNOW VISION

Later, the slashing, frigid rain
had transformed into sifting snow.
I trudged home in beauty and pain.
As I walked in the yellow glow
of a cautioning traffic light,
I saw my shadow flee and grow.
It rushed headlong into the night
while the aura cast from above
turned snow on the street amber bright.
My vision soared, a circling dove.
I saw that tenements are spun
out of atoms, the soil and love.
And then I knew that earth and sun
and lowly bricks, and even I –
all in the universe is one.
Too soon this great intensity,
this vision of death and rebirth,
began to weight too much on me.
And my soul fell back to earth.

Aside from some poetic license, especially “my soul fell back to earth”, the poem accurately depicts what happened. There is no better word to describe this experience, I submit, than “spiritual”.

In an article published last year in *Free Inquiry*, Editor Tom Flynn offered “95 ways not to say spirit”. Since the word has many connotations that are not supernatural, 45 words in the list relate to categories such as life, courage, nature, etc. Fifty words are offered as substitutes for “spirit” in the sense of “the sublime”, the category that best covers the modern meaning of the word. But the only word on the list that comes close to describing my experience is “inspiring”. However, that word derives from the same Latin root as “spirit”, so even it fails to solve the problem. What's more, “inspiring” does not come close to describing the transformative power of my experience and the meaningful insight it provided.

In an opposing article, use of the word “spirit” was defended by Andy Norman, a philosophy professor at Carnegie Mellon University. In his view, “spirit-talk has real benefits”. He offers an example: “If a family member is struggling with a protracted illness, you can gather every objective fact worth knowing, and it will still be important to find out whether he or she is ‘in good spirits’. No other words in the English language are quite right for the job. (Compare with ‘How's your mood, Mom?’).”

Norman also stresses the importance of including “spiritual but not religious” people in the growing ranks of secularism. “These people are natural allies,” he argues. “And they're struggling to express something important to them. To make our shores really welcoming, we have to

listen to them. Really listen.” He points to Jonathan Haidt’s book, *The Happiness Hypothesis*, which “likens a world without spiritual depth to a ‘flatland’ and argues that there is a ‘dimension’ of experience that we seculars are prone to miss”.

“We encounter spiritual issues every time we wonder where the universe comes from, why we are here, or what happens when we die,” says Robert C. Fuller, Professor of Religious Studies at Bradley University. “An idea or practice is ‘spiritual,’” he adds, “when it reveals our personal desire to establish a felt-relationship with the deepest meanings or powers governing life.”

A deep experience that transcends routine reality is an entirely natural activity of the brain that can offer a glimpse at an ultimate truth—all of us and everything in the cosmos are composed of the dust of exploded stars. We are literally at one with the universe.

FIXING OUR SCHOOLS:

A CONTRARIAN POINT OF VIEW

A Double Book Review: Of *Reign of Error*, by Diane Ravitch, and of *The Smartest Kids in the World, and How They Got That Way*, by Amanda Ripley

Bill Chapman

In the October, 2013 issue of PIQUE, there was a very favorable review of Diane Ravitch’s *Reign of Error*, a book against education reform. The review quotes *Reign of Error* as claiming American schools are “underfunded” — which is poppycock — the US spends more per public school student than nearly all other countries.

Teachers often make the argument that, since it is hard to assess merit in their profession, they should be exempt from meritocracy. This is preposterous. In many professions, including my own (software engineering), assessing job performance is highly subjective and personal, and it often turns out to be unjust. In any private-sector, non-union job, meritocracy is imposed, however unfair. Teachers need to grow up and accept that they owe it to society to put up with having their performance assessed, and that very few people in a healthy society should have 100 percent job security.

It is hard to imagine a more perfect champion of mediocrity than Diane Ravitch, who claims that the poor performance of American students compared to other countries is all due to social ills outside the classroom, especially the fact that 25 percent of American school children live in poverty. Her solution is to eliminate standardized testing, banish all meritocracy from the teaching profession, and do absolutely nothing to improve the education system until everything outside the classroom is fixed. Her book discusses every education reform initiative going on in this country, one by one, and claims they are all counter-productive.

American school reformers generally want to fire bad teachers, and when layoffs happen, do them by merit rather

than seniority. Ravitch makes the absurd argument that it is “unproven” that these things will improve teaching quality. It seems to me that those reforms are so self-evidently beneficial that the burden of “proof” should be on Ravitch.

I think *Reign of Error* will appeal to liberals, who are usually loathe to criticize any union, however destructive, and among whom “meritocracy” is not a valued ideal. The book that I read after *Reign of Error* was *The Smartest Kids in the World*, by Amanda Ripley, which takes a different approach. Ripley examined scores in various counties on the PISA test, an international test to assess high school student performance, and then established relationships with American exchange high school students going to those countries, and had them describe what they observed. She also sent questionnaires to hundreds of exchange students, both foreign students on exchange to the US, and vice-versa. She also traveled to some high-performing countries. It should be noted that the PISA test was designed to test imagination and out-of-the-box thinking, rather than rote memorization.

Ripley points out that other countries with outstanding educational systems did not wait to fix poverty before fixing the schools. If poverty is the only problem, why does Poland, with 25 percent of the US’s per-capita, outperform us?

American high school students really suck at math, by international standards. A lot of that is because their teachers do, too. Americans college students majoring in education take special math classes designed for people who don’t like math. They pass on to their students the notion that math is “hard” and “not for everyone”. Also, Americans teach much less math in elementary school than other countries.

Ripley describes some cultural factors that are working against the US. Americans tend to believe that math is an innate ability, and one that most people don’t really have, while other countries believe that everyone is capable of considerable proficiency at math. We also make high school sports a much, much higher priority than other countries do, which detracts from everything else.

Finland, which everyone agrees has the best high schools in the world, made education one of the hardest, if not the hardest, college majors to get into and graduate from. This elevated the prestige of the profession, which drew even more talented people to it. Some people objected to these reforms, arguing that less intelligent teachers can relate better to struggling students, but they were ignored.

Rigor was an important component in any excellent education system. Surveys showed that American teachers were more lavish with praise than teachers in other countries, where praise was withheld until it was genuinely deserved. There was an overwhelming consensus among exchange students going both ways that high school was considerably easier in this country than elsewhere. Ripley says: “Only later, after high school, would [American students] discover they had been tricked. The real world did not always give second and third chances; the real world didn’t give credit just for showing up.”

VOTE EARLY AND VOTE OFTEN FOR THE DUMBTH OF THE YEAR

The votes are coming in – where is yours? Every reader of PIQUE (and family and friends) is eligible to help choose the nationally-recognizable personality who was most spectacularly wrong-headed, denying or clueless about reality in 2013.

Vote now at editor@shsny.org, or leave a message at 646-922-7389, and vote again at our February 15 Anniversary/Darwin Dinner (see page 7), at which the winner of the not-so-coveted horse's-ass trophy will be announced.

Here are the nominated numbskulls:

Larry Ward, Chairman of the failed January 19 Gun Appreciation Day rally, said: "I think Martin Luther King, Jr., would agree with me if he were alive today that if African-Americans had been given the right to keep and bear arms from day one of the country's founding, perhaps slavery might not have been a chapter in our history."

Bryan Fisher, Issues Director of the Christian fundamentalist American Family Association, while shilling for the oil industry's fracking programs, told his radio audience that God's feelings will be hurt if America stops using fossil fuels for energy, i.e.: "God has buried those treasures there because he loves to see us find them."

Rep. Steve Stockman, Republican from Texas' 36th District, a man whose pro-gun, anti-choice career even the conservative *Houston Chronicle* called "weird", combined his two themes in one reelection-campaign bumper sticker: "If babies had guns they wouldn't be aborted."

Penny Nance, President of Concerned Women for America, while promoting the bogus National Day of Prayer on Fox News, offered: "The Age of Enlightenment and Reason gave way to moral relativism, and moral relativism is what led us all the way down the dark path to the Holocaust."

Rep. Scott Rigell, Republican from Virginia's 2nd District. Scott, preemptively fending off any crazier-than-him right-wing primary challenger, told Politico: "I wake up every day not thinking about social issues."

Megyn Kelly, gorgeous Fox News anchor, commented on a Slate article suggesting that African-Americans need a black Santa Claus: "You know, I mean, Jesus was a white man too. He was a historical figure; that's a verifiable fact, as is Santa, I want you kids watching to know that."

Vote now! Make sure your vote is counted in the most important election of the year (You don't really think the Congressional elections in November are going to change anything, do you?). – JR

FINALLY, MORE JOKES FOR INTELLECTUALS

Pavlov is enjoying a pint in the pub. The phone rings. He jumps and shouts: "Oh hell, I forgot to feed the dog!"

How many programmers does it take to change a light bulb? None, it's a hardware problem.

When I heard that oxygen and magnesium hooked up I was like OMg.

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